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Recent Physics Results from NSTX

J.E. Menard 1), M.G. Bell 1), R.E. Bell 1), J.M. Bialek 2), J.A. Boedo 3), C.E. Bush 4), N.A. Crocker 5), S. Diem 1), J.R. Ferron 6), E.D. Fredrickson 1), D.A. Gates 1), K.W. Hill 1), J.C. Hosea 1), S.M. Kaye 1), C.E. Kessel 1), S. Kubota 5), H.W. Kugel 1), B.P. LeBlanc 1), K.C. Lee 7), F.M. Levinton 8), R. Maingi 4), D.K. Mansfield 1), R.P. Majeski) R.J. Maqueda 8), E. Mazzucato 1), S.S. Medley 1), D. Mueller 1), H.K. Park 1), S.F. Paul 1), W.A. Peebles 5), R. Raman 9), S.A. Sabbagh 2), C.H. Skinner 1), D.R. Smith 1), A.C. Sontag 2), V.A. Soukhanovskii 10), B.C. Stratton 1), D. Stutman 11), G. Taylor 1), K. Tritz 11), J.R. Wilson 1), H. Yuh 8), W. Zhu 2), S.J. Zweben 1), and the NSTX Research Team.

1) Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, Princeton, NJ, USA

2) Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

3) University of California - San Diego, San Diego, CA, USA

4) Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge, TN, USA

5) University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, USA

6) General Atomics, San Diego, CA, USA

7) University of California - Davis, Davis, CA, USA

8) Nova Photonics, Inc., Princeton, NJ, USA

9) University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA

10) Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, CA, USA

11) Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA

email-contact of main author: jmenard@pppl.gov

Abstract - The National Spherical Torus Experiment (NSTX) has made considerable progress in advancing the scientific understanding of high performance long-pulse plasmas needed for ITER and future low-aspect-ratio Spherical Torus (ST) devices. Plasma durations up to 1.6s (5 current redistribution times) have been achieved at plasma currents of 0.7 MA with non-inductive current fractions above 65% while achieving β_T and β_N values of 16% and 5.7 (%mT/MA), respectively. Newly available Motional Stark Effect data has allowed systematic study and validation of current drive sources and improved the understanding of “hybrid”-like scenarios. In MHD research, six mid-plane ex-vessel radial field coils have been utilized to infer and correct intrinsic error fields, provide rotation control, and actively stabilize the n=1 resistive wall mode at ITER-relevant low plasma rotation values. In transport and turbulence, the low aspect ratio and wide range of achievable β in NSTX provide unique data for confinement scaling studies. A new high-k scattering diagnostic is investigating turbulent density fluctuations with wavenumbers extending from ion to electron gyro-scales. In the area of energetic particle research, cyclic neutron rate drops have been associated with the destabilization of multiple large Toroidal Alfvén Eigenmodes (TAEs) similar to the “sea-of-TAE” modes predicted for ITER. Three wave coupling processes between energetic particle modes and TAEs have also been observed for the first time. In boundary physics, advanced shape control has been utilized to study the role of magnetic balance in H-mode access and ELM stability. Peak divertor heat flux has been reduced by a factor of 5 using an H-mode compatible radiative divertor, and Lithium conditioning has demonstrated particle pumping and improved thermal confinement. Finally, non-solenoidal plasma start-up research is particularly important for the ST, and Coaxial Helicity Injection has now produced 160kA plasma currents on closed magnetic flux surfaces.

1. Progress in Plasma Performance and Understanding

The National Spherical Torus Experiment (NSTX) [1, 2] has made considerable progress in advancing the scientific understanding of high performance long-pulse plasmas needed for low-aspect-ratio spherical torus (ST) [3] concepts and for ITER. Several new tools [4] that have aided this progress include: modified divertor poloidal field coils for combined high triangularity with high elongation [5], a Motional Stark Effect diagnostic operable at low magnetic field strength [6], and six mid-plane ex-vessel coils producing controllable radial magnetic field perturbations for rotation control [7], error field correction [4], and resistive wall mode (RWM) control at ITER-relevant low plasma rotation values [8].

As shown in Figure 1a, plasma flat-top durations approaching 5 current redistribution times and 50 energy confinement times have been achieved with the product of normalized beta and confinement enhancement $\equiv \beta_N H_{89P}$ in the range needed for an ST-based Component Test Facility (CTF) [9]. The longest discharge pulse-length achieved to-date using up to 7MW of Neutral Beam Injection (NBI) heating is 1.6s - a 60% increase relative to 2004. These discharges have flat-top plasma currents of 0.7 MA with peak non-inductive (NI) current fractions $f_{NI} \leq 65\%$ while achieving $\beta_T \leq 17\%$ and $\beta_N \leq 5.7(\% \text{mT/MA})$, respectively. This performance has been achieved by operating with increased boundary triangularity at high elongation utilizing advanced shape control [10], from a reduction in the severity of Edge-Localized Modes (ELMs) at high elongation by operating with slightly negative magnetic balance ($\delta R_{SEP} = -2$ to -5mm) [5, 11] and operation above the ideal no-wall stability limit and near the ideal-wall stability limit [12, 13, 14] via rotational stabilization of the RWM. NSTX now routinely operates with sustained boundary elongation of 2.4-2.5, and as is evident from Figure 1b, can stably access significantly higher elongation with a peak value of 3 achieved in 2006 [15]. Since $f_{BS} \propto \sqrt{\epsilon}(1 + \kappa^2)\beta_N^2/\beta_T$, increased elongation is a primary means of increasing the bootstrap fraction while maintaining high β_T . As seen in Figure 1c, the highest performance NSTX plasmas are very close to simultaneously achieving $\beta_T = 20\%$ and $f_{BS} = 50\%$ projected to be required for a ST-CTF.

The longest duration discharges of NSTX described above often maintain central q above unity for many current redistribution times. Improved understanding of this physics may offer insight into mechanisms that sustain the “hybrid” scenario proposed as a possible improved high-Q scenario for ITER [16]. Such studies have been enabled by a 12 channel MSE diagnostic operable at the low toroidal fields of NSTX [6].

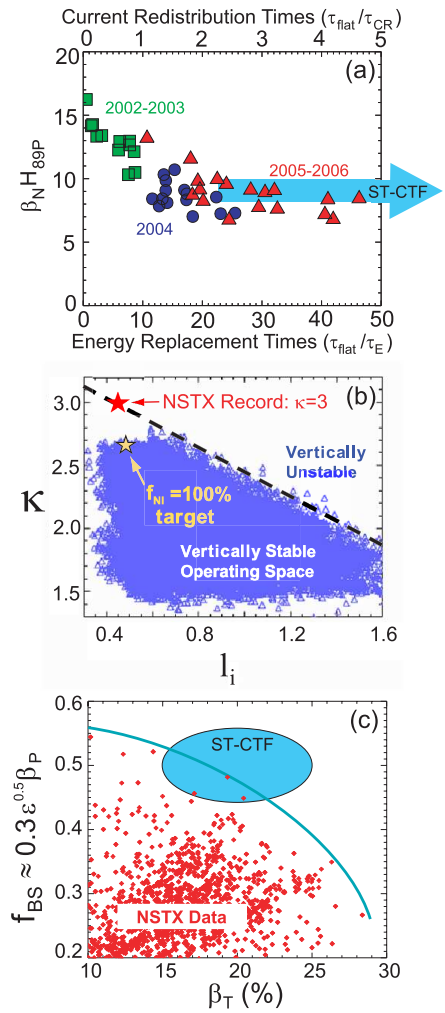


Figure 1: (a) $\beta_N \times H_{89P}$ vs. normalized pulse length, (b) peak elongation vs. internal inductance, and (c) peak estimated bootstrap fraction vs. toroidal beta.

Figure 2a compares the measured total plasma current to the predicted current from both inductive and non-inductive sources. Here, the loop voltage profiles are computed directly from the MSE-constrained reconstructions, the inductive and bootstrap currents are calculated using Sauter's formulae [17], and the NBI current drive (NBICD) is computed using TRANSP [18]. For discharges that are sufficiently MHD-quiescent, the measured and predicted total currents and neutron rates typically agree to within 5-10%. As seen in Figure 2b, the reconstructed and predicted plasma current density profiles are also in good agreement with NBICD dominating the non-inductive current drive in the plasma core, and bootstrap (BS) current dominating off-axis. During the highest $\beta_N = 5.5-6$ phase of such discharges, the plasma is typically near the ideal-wall limit, and repeated excursions above this limit have been observed to trigger saturated core-localized $n=1$ interchange-type instabilities [19]. During such MHD activity, discrepancies as large as 40% between the reconstructed and predicted core current density have been observed. Significant deviations between the predicted and measured fast particle distributions are also evident in the neutron rate and Neutral Particle Analyzer (NPA) data [20]. Agreement between measurement and prediction is significantly improved if the $n=1$ mode is assumed to cause significant NBI fast-particle redistribution in the plasma core with moderate global loss $< 15\%$. As seen in Figure 2c, such redistribution can apparently convert a centrally-peaked NBICD profile to a flat or even hollow profile.

Validation of the various non-inductive current drive sources in the absence of large-scale MHD activity has also enabled identification of fully non-inductive scenarios extrapolated from the present discharge parameters shown in Figure 2 to the current profiles shown in Figure 3 [21]. Requirements for fully non-inductive $I_P = 700\text{kA}$, $B_T = 5.2\text{kG}$ equilibria include increasing the thermal temperatures 50-70%, decreasing the electron density 25%, increasing elongation from 2.3 to 2.6 and bottom triangularity from 0.75 to 0.85. The resultant increase in β_N from 5.6 to 6.7 would require either enhanced confinement from Lithium wall conditioning as described in Section 5, and/or efficiently coupled High-harmonic Fast-Wave (HHFW) heating as described in Section 6. This increased β_N scenario is calculated to be $n=1-3$ ideal-wall stable for the predicted increase in q_{MIN} to 2.4 from 1.3 and would require RWM stabilization either from plasma rotation and dissipation and/or active feedback control.

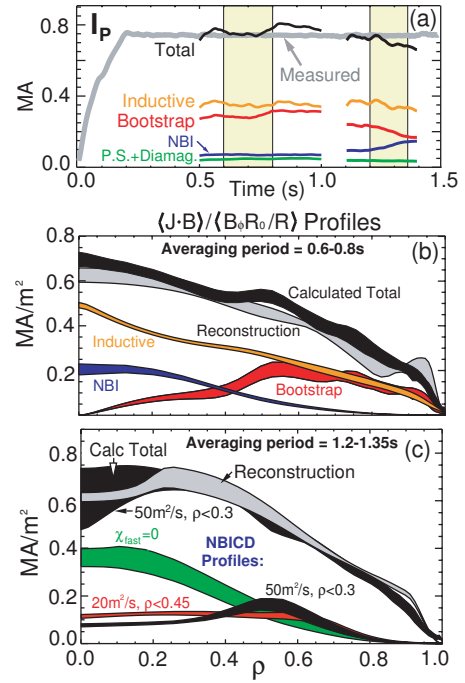


Figure 2: (a) Comparison of predicted and measured total current, (b) comparison of measured and reconstructed current density profiles during high β , MHD-quiescent phase, and (c) evidence for MHD-induced NBICD diffusion.

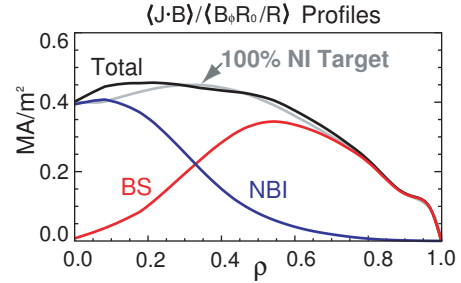


Figure 3: J profiles for a fully-non-inductive target equilibrium utilizing only NBI and BS current.

2. Macroscopic stability

In most high- β_N scenarios in NSTX operating above the no-wall stability limit, RWM stabilization is achieved passively from high plasma rotation due to unidirectional and tangential NBI heating. However, some discharges fail to operate robustly above the no-wall limit in a sustained way, and exhibit rotation slow-down at radii near the $q=2$ and 3 surfaces. Six mid-plane ex-vessel coils (RWM/EF coils) producing controllable $n=1$ and/or $n=3$ radial magnetic fields have been commissioned on NSTX and utilized to study error fields and RWM physics in detail. Real-time measurement and closed-loop feedback-control of low-frequency MHD activity including unstable RWMs and error fields amplified by the stable RWM have also been implemented on NSTX. Low-density locked-mode threshold experiments have identified resonant $n=1$ error fields (EF) of 1-3 Gauss [4] calculated at the $q=2$ surface near $\rho_{pol} \equiv \sqrt{\psi_{pol}} = 0.7-0.8$. Additional experiments at higher β observed error fields of similar magnitudes but of opposite polarity. The source of this error field has since been traced to ohmic heating (OH) solenoid induced relative motion of the toroidal field (TF) central rod with respect to the vacuum vessel and poloidal field (PF) coils. The error field is measured to be proportional to the time-delayed and partially-rectified product of the OH and TF coil currents. Correction of this error field has been attempted using several control methods. First, as seen in Figure 4 open-loop correction of the OH \times TF error-field (black curves) increases the pulse duration above the no-wall limit by approximately 50% relative to no correction (red curves) during the high β_N phase. As seen in the same Figure, the addition (green curves) of gain and phase-optimized closed-loop control of the measured real-time $n=1$ poloidal field to open-loop correction can double the duration above the no-wall limit. Additional tests in these discharges find that closed-loop feedback alone does not provide robust pulse extension early in the high- β_N phase, and that the correction is not yet optimized late in the high- β_N phase. Finally, using the time-average of the open-loop correction plus closed-loop feedback coil currents (blue curves) provides nearly identical performance as the non-averaged coil currents. Because the measured RWM growth time (see below) is much shorter than the averaging time used in these experiments, this result implies that the feedback control system is responding to plasma induced error-field amplification and is aiding to sustain the plasma rotation and rotationally stabilize the RWM rather than feeding back directly on the unstable RWM.

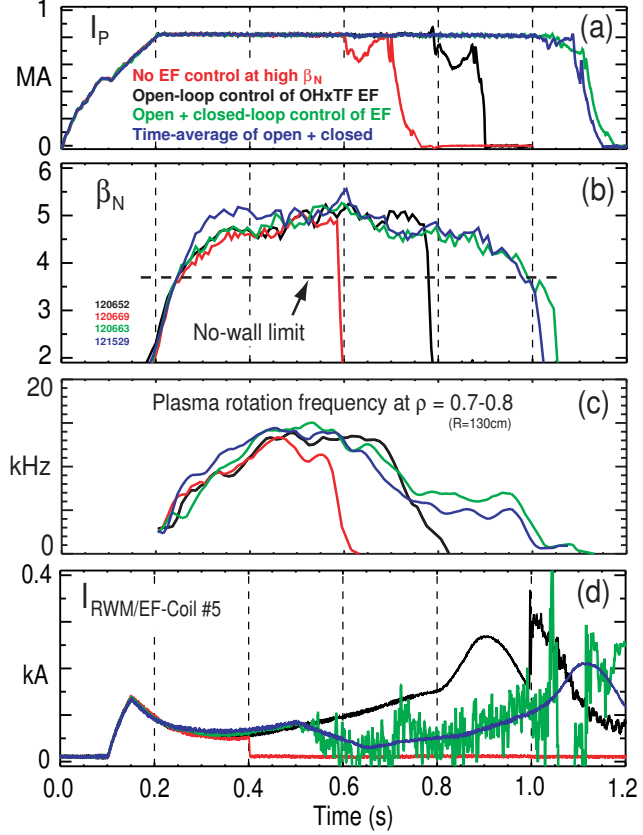


Figure 4: (a) Plasma current, (b) normalized beta, (c) plasma rotation near $q=2$ and 3 surfaces, and (d) RWM/EF coil current during dynamic error field correction experiments.

The same RWM/EF control coils used for error field correction studies have also been used for investigate magnetic braking physics and feedback stabilization of the RWM. Rotation damping from both $n=1$ and $n=3$ fields has been compared to Neoclassical Toroidal Viscosity (NTV) theory, and Figure 5a shows an example of the good agreement between the measured and predicted torques for $n=3$ radial magnetic fields applied by the RWM/EF coils [7]. Both $n=1$ and $n=3$ applied fields have been shown capable of lowering the plasma rotation to values below the RWM critical rotation frequency. However, the non-resonant $n=3$ field is most commonly used for magnetic braking when studying the $n=1$ RWM to minimize complications in measuring and interpreting $n=1$ RWM growth. This technique has been used to measure the $n=1$ critical rotation frequency [13, 22] and has allowed controlled experiments of $n=1$ RWM feedback stabilization at ITER-relevant low plasma rotation levels [8]. The black curve in Figure 5b illustrates the undamped rotation profile typical of the rotationally-stabilized plasmas in these experiments, while the red and green curves show the rotation profiles at $n=1$ RWM marginal stability and during RWM closed-loop feedback control, respectively. As seen in the figure, the rotation during feedback is approximately 1/3 of the critical value and is below the normalized rotation value predicted for ITER. Figures 5c and d show that feedback control of the RWM (black curves) can extend the duration of high β_N above the no-wall limit by over 90 RWM growth times while the plasma rotation is maintained below the experimentally determined critical rotation frequency. This low rotation is sustained by steady $n=3$ braking from the nearly constant RWM/EF coil currents as illustrated in Figure 5e. Finally, Figure 5f shows the $n=1$ mode poloidal field as measured by the in-vessel RWM/EF sensor array with (black) and without (red) close-loop RWM control enabled demonstrating the suppression of RWM $n=1$ field by the feedback system. The results above improve the prospects for robust error field and RWM control at high β_N in ITER and other magnetic fusion concepts operating above the no-wall ideal-stability limit.

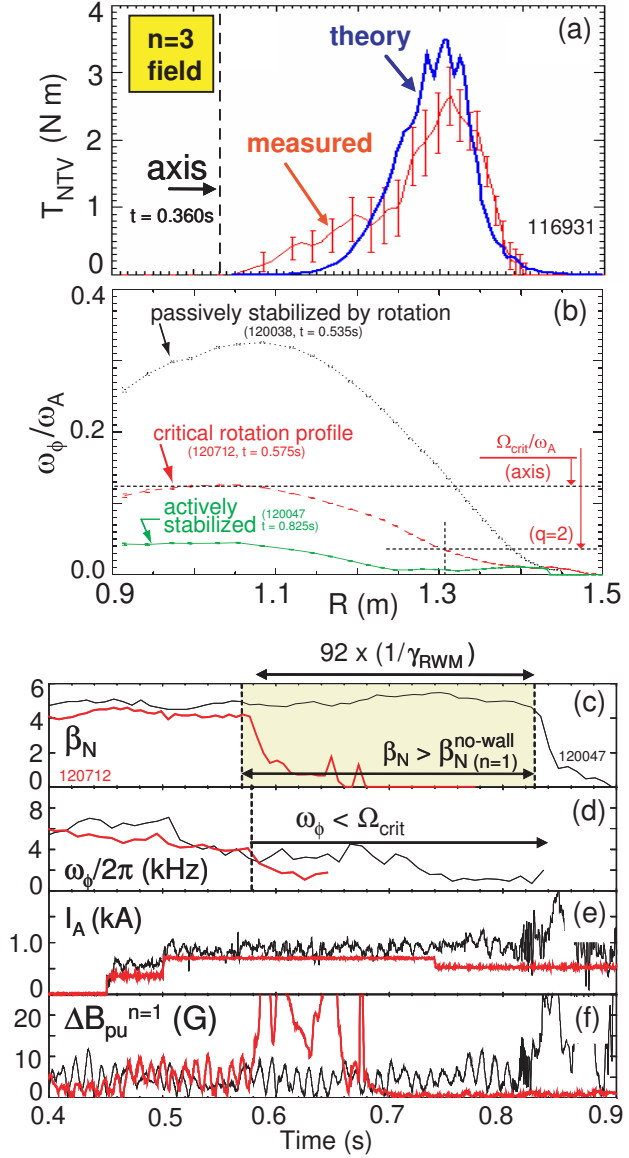


Figure 5: (a) Torque comparison, (b) plasma rotation profiles, and evolution of (c) normalized beta, (d) rotation, (e) RWM/EF coil current, and (f) mode $n=1$ poloidal field for magnetic braking and RWM feedback experiments.

3. Transport and Turbulence

The low aspect ratio and wide range of values accessible in NSTX (β_T up to 40%) provide unique data for understanding the dependence of energy confinement on these parameters for the ST and for ITER. Initial H-mode energy confinement scaling studies for NSTX found a weaker dependence on plasma current than at conventional aspect ratio and a stronger dependence on B_T [23]. NSTX H-mode confinement data has also been incorporated into international confinement databases, and resulting scalings using this and higher aspect ratio data indicate a stronger positive inverse aspect ratio dependence and weaker β dependence than in the commonly used ITER98PB(y,2) scaling. More recent experiments have elucidated the distinct roles of ion and electron thermal transport in the global energy confinement scaling [24]. In particular, magnetic field scans increasing the toroidal magnetic field from 0.35T to 0.55T result in a broadening of the electron temperature profile and a reduction in χ_e in the outer half of the plasma minor radius. Interestingly, the central electron temperature is observed to increase only 10-20% during this scan. As the plasma current is increased from 0.7-1.0MA, the ion transport is reduced the outer half of the plasma minor radius consistent with $\chi_i \approx \chi_{i-neoclassical}$. Thus, the electron transport largely determines the toroidal field scaling, while the ion (neoclassical) transport largely determines the plasma current scaling [24].

In the NSTX H-modes described above, the electron energy transport is anomalous. To investigate possible causes of anomalous electron transport, a high- k scattering diagnostic capable of measuring electron gyro-radius-scale turbulence has been implemented on NSTX. Figure 6a shows a top-down view of the microwave ray paths for scattered rays accepted by the collection waveguides of the system. The mm-wave 280GHz system provides high radial spatial resolution $< 6\text{cm}$, high k resolution $< 1\text{cm}^{-1}$, the ability to scan radially from near the magnetic axis to near the edge, and measures predominantly k_r from 2-24 cm^{-1} covering ion to electron-scale turbulence. Data from this diagnostic will provide strong tests of anomalous electron energy transport theories - of particular importance to developing first-principles predictive capability for electron energy transport for ITER and magnetic confinement devices in general. The availability of MSE data has also improved understanding of the role of magnetic shear in energy transport. In particular, reversed magnetic shear has been demonstrated to allow the formation of electron energy transport barriers in L-mode discharges, and electron energy confinement improvement correlates with the degree of measured magnetic shear reversal [2, 4, 24].

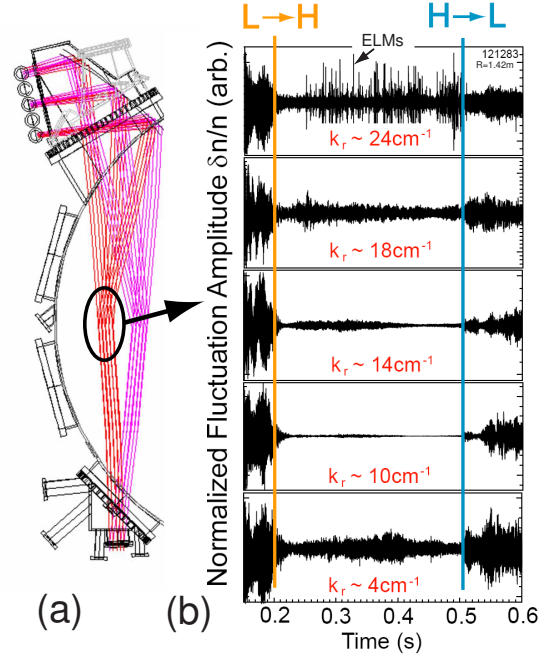


Figure 6: (a) Radially scannable high- k scattering diagnostic as viewed from above, (b) $\delta n/n$ fluctuation levels (renormalized to initial L-mode values) in L-mode and H-mode of a $P_{NBI}=2\text{MW}$, $I_P=0.8\text{MA}$, $B_T=0.45\text{T}$ discharge.

These high- $T_e \leq 2\text{keV}$ L-mode discharges are typically heated with one NBI source of $P_{NBI}=1.6\text{--}2\text{MW}$ and achieve some of the highest transient energy confinement times in NSTX of $\tau_E=80\text{--}100\text{ms}$ but have low β_N limits ≤ 4 and low non-inductive current fractions relative to the positive shear $T_e \leq 1.2\text{keV}$ H-mode discharges heated with $4\text{--}7\text{MW}$ as described in Section 1. Analysis of high- k density fluctuation amplitude as a function of core magnetic shear in high- T_e L-mode discharges does indicate some dependence on magnetic shear, but firm conclusions cannot yet be drawn. However, other discharge scenarios do show clear correlations between reduced transport and reduced density fluctuation amplitudes. With the high- k system view at large major radius (see black oval in Figure 6a), Figure 6b shows a large reduction in fluctuation levels after the transition from L-mode to H-mode for nearly all radial wavenumbers measurable by the system. Interestingly, the highest $k_r = 24\text{ cm}^{-1}$ signal exhibits amplitude bursts during H-mode which correlate with ELM events. Present studies are attempting to determine if these bursts correspond directly to ELM-induced density perturbations of short radial scale-length, or are instead due to beam refraction effects.

Beyond the passive observation of transport properties, Lithium-pellet-induced edge temperature perturbations have allowed the core electron transport response to be probed for both kinds of discharges and indicate very different transport responses. Figure 7a shows the electron temperature evolution in a positive shear H-mode discharge ($P_{NBI}=5.5\text{MW}$, $I_P=0.7\text{MA}$, $B_T=0.45\text{T}$) using two-color Ultra-Soft X-Ray (USXR) tomography [25]. Following the pellet perturbation, the core electron temperature gradient scale-length shown in Figure 7b is essentially constant indicating very stiff profiles consistent with the existence of a critical temperature gradient. In contrast, Figure 7c shows that the core electron temperature actually increases in L-mode ($P_{NBI}=2\text{MW}$, $I_P=1\text{MA}$, $B_T=0.45\text{T}$) after pellet injection, and Figure 7d indicates a significant increase in normalized temperature gradient and an apparent lack of profile stiffness. The ability to create and diagnose scenarios with large variations in electron transport while largely suppressing ion turbulence makes NSTX particularly well-suited for studying electron transport physics.

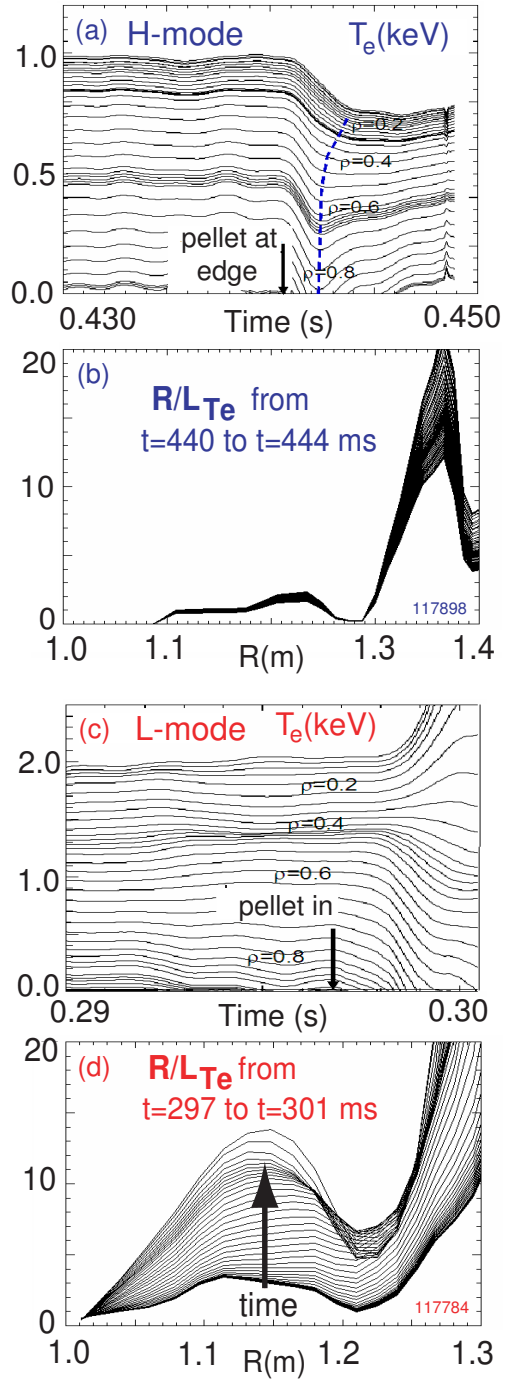


Figure 7: (a) T_e and (b) T_e gradient evolution in H-mode, and (c) T_e and (d) T_e gradient evolution in L-mode during edge perturbations induced by Lithium pellet injection.

4. Energetic Particle Physics

NSTX is also well suited to investigate fast-ion driven instabilities and their influence on fast particle confinement for both ITER and STs. NBI-heated NSTX plasmas can match and exceed the fast-ion β and velocity ratio v_{fast}/v_{Alfven} of ITER (albeit at much higher fast-ion ρ_*) with complete diagnostic coverage including MSE. Cyclic neutron rate drops have been associated with the destabilization of multiple large Toroidal Alfvén Eigenmodes (TAEs) similar to the “sea-of-TAEs” predicted for ITER, albeit at lower TAE toroidal mode number $n=1-6$ [26]. Neutral Particle Analyzer data shows the strongest particle density modulation occurs below the injection half-energy and that the density of the highest energy ions is modulated by roughly 10% [20].

Figure 8 compares the mode frequencies, fluctuation amplitudes, and neutron rate decrements (fast-ion loss) during single-mode and multi-mode TAE burst events. An important finding evident in this figure is that multi-mode burst events lead to $5\times$ higher fast-ion losses than single-mode events despite having $2-3\times$ lower RMS B-field fluctuation amplitude (0.15-0.2G vs. 0.3-0.5G). This data implies that the structure and multiplicity of TAE modes is just as important as mode amplitude (if not more so) in determining the mode-induced fast ion transport. Interestingly, recent NSTX results indicate that multi-mode coupling is not constrained to a single class of fast-ion instability. Figure 9a shows that TAE modes can coexist with Energetic Particle Modes (EPMs), and bicoherence analysis indicates that an $n=1$ EPM mode can couple to two higher- n (and higher frequency) TAE modes through a three-wave coupling process [27]. In fact, the dominant EPM can drive the TAE amplitude envelope to be toroidally localized during mode propagation as shown in Figure 9b. The data in Figures 8 and 9 together imply that the structure, multiplicity, and non-linear coupling characteristics of multiple fast-ion instabilities could all play a role in determining fast-ion transport in future ST devices and ITER.

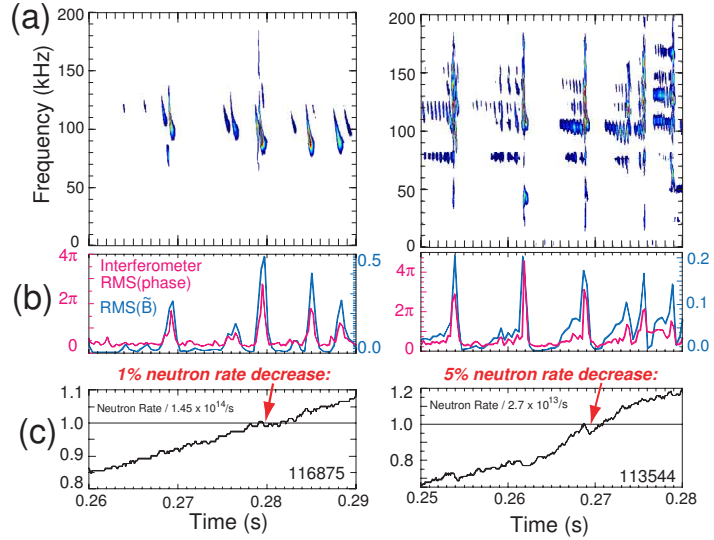


Figure 8: (a) Mode frequency spectra, (b) density fluctuation and Mirnov oscillation amplitudes, and (c) neutron rate decrements during single-mode TAE (left) and multi-mode TAE (right) bursts.

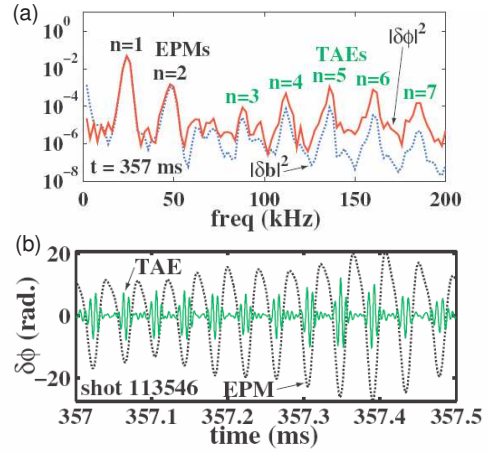


Figure 9: (a) Mirnov and reflectometer spectra showing multiple EPM and TAE modes, and (b) toroidal localization of TAE amplitude envelope from 3-wave coupling to $n=1$ EPM.

5. Boundary Physics

Improved understanding and control of both steady-state and transient heat fluxes to the divertor and other plasma facing components are essential for the successful operation of ITER and future ST devices such as an ST-CTF. Large transient heat loads from ELMs pose a serious risk to the divertor of next-step devices, and this has motivated research on developing small ELM regimes and complete ELM suppression using “edge-ergodization” coils [28]. Modest changes in ELM size and frequency have been achieved in NSTX using the RWM/EF coils, and additional analysis indicates that such ELM mitigation can be further optimized [29]. However, a small “Type-V” ELM regime with $\Delta W/W_{TOT} < 1\%$ has been discovered on NSTX [30], and accessibility to this regime has been characterized as a function of pedestal collisionality, β_N , and boundary shaping [31]. More recent studies indicate that access to this small-ELM regime may be possible at low pedestal collisionality at high shape factors accessible in the ST, and more detailed measurements of Type V ELM structure and dynamics have been obtained [11]. ELM severity is also observed to be very sensitive to magnetic balance, with the optimal ELM characteristics typically obtained in a shape with negative bias, i.e. toward lower single null [5, 11]. Studies of these effects has been facilitated by the successful implementation of rt-EFIT and the precise boundary control it enables [10]. This shape control capability has also been exploited to enable similarity experiments with MAST and DIII-D investigating the dependence of the H-mode pedestal structure on aspect ratio. In these experiments, the boundary shape and electron collisionality (ν_e^*) and normalized ion gyroradius (ρ_i^*) at the top of the outboard pedestal are matched. The pedestal data from all three devices is presently being assessed to develop an improved understanding for reliably extrapolating from present experiments to the pedestal parameters expected in ITER [32]. Outside the pedestal, particle and energy transport in the scrape-off-layer are also being actively investigated in both DIII-D and NSTX [33].

Aside from the management of transient heat fluxes, steady-state heat flux levels also pose serious issues for ITER and beyond. To reduce peak heat fluxes in the divertor, NSTX has made significant progress in developing both detached and radiative divertor scenarios via gas puffing at the inner strike point and/or private flux region of lower single null discharges [34]. The inner strike point of NSTX divertor discharges is typically observed to be fully detached, while the outer strike point is only partially detached.

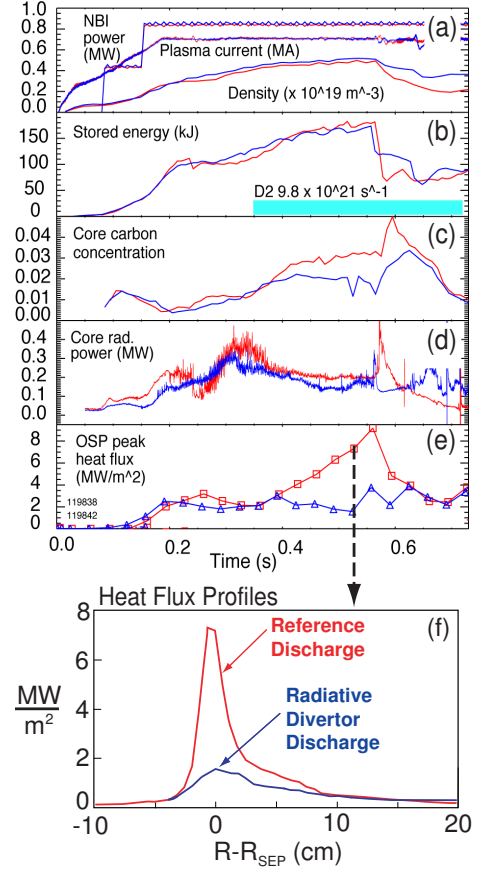


Figure 10: Time evolution of (a) plasma current, line-average density, and NBI heating power, (b) plasma stored energy, (c) core carbon concentration, (d) core radiated power, (e) peak divertor heat flux, and (f) radial profile of divertor heat flux for reference and radiative divertor discharges.

With sufficient D_2 gas injection in the divertor, it is also possible to detach the outer strike point, but thus far this has led to loss of H-mode and deleterious MHD activity. However, with reduced gas input, a “radiative divertor” regime has been developed which is also capable of significant reductions in peak divertor heat flux. Figures 10a-b show that the required gas injection in the divertor has no apparent impact on H-mode confinement, while Figures 10c-d indicate a modest decrease in core carbon concentration and radiation. Importantly, Figures 10e-f show that the peak heat flux is reduced by a factor of 5 prior to the onset of β -limiting MHD present in both the reference and radiative divertor discharge.

Even with the divertor heat flux reduction techniques described above, solid plasma facing components may be incapable of handling the very high peak divertor heat fluxes projected for future fusion power reactors such as ARIES-AT [35] ($14\text{MW}/\text{m}^2$) or ARIES-ST [36] ($33\text{MW}/\text{m}^2$). Liquid metal divertors offer a possible solution to this heat flux problem, and following the success of liquid lithium for particle pumping [37] and peak heat flux mitigation in CDX-U, NSTX has also been pursuing a staged approach to Lithiumization. Following success in demonstrating particle pumping with Lithium pellet conditioning, NSTX has used a Lithium evaporator to achieve more rapid coatings of plasma facing components [38]. As shown on the left-hand-side of Figure 11, the NSTX Li-evaporator was designed to provide broad coverage of the lower centerstack and divertor region. H-modes are observed to be the most challenging plasma scenarios to achieve density control through Li-conditioning, and while strong pumping is observed early in such discharges, the density rate of rise later in the discharge

is usually similar to that observed without Li-conditioning. Figure 11a shows the modest 10-15% density decrease achieved with Lithium achieved thus far late in H-mode discharges. However, evaporated Lithium has been observed to have a more pronounced effect on other discharge parameters. Figure 11b shows that Lithiumization reduces the plasma Z_{eff} by up to 35%, and as evident in Figures 11c and d, increases the electron and ion temperatures by up 25% and 40% respectively. Lithium is observed to improve the H-mode confinement enhancement factor relative to ITER98PB(y,2) from $HH = 1.08$ to 1.28. Such thermal confinement enhancements improve the prospects for achieving the fully non-inductive scenarios discussed in Section 1. Development of a liquid lithium divertor target is presently being considered to provide both enhanced particle pumping and initial studies of high-heat-flux handling capability.

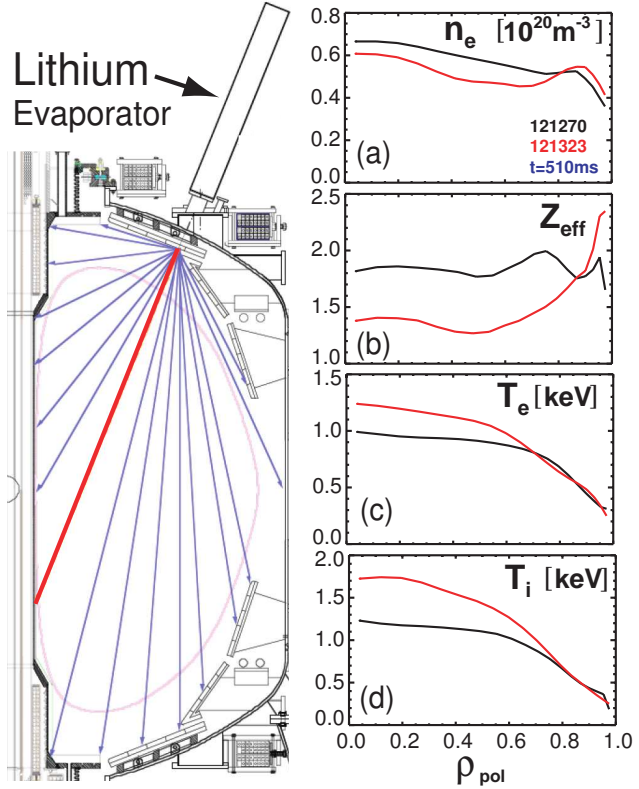


Figure 11: Comparisons of (a) electron density, (b) Z_{eff} , (c) electron temperature, and (d) ion temperature before (black) and after (red) Li-conditioning using the evaporator shown on the left of the Figure.

6. Solenoid-free current formation and ramp-up

To minimize the radial build and maintain low aspect ratio in future ST devices, elimination of the central solenoid is highly desirable. Such elimination is only possible with alternative means of plasma current formation and ramp-up. For plasma current formation, Coaxial Helicity Injection (CHI) has recently demonstrated record values of closed-flux plasma current up to 160kA [39, 40]. Consistent with flux closure, Figure 12a shows that the plasma current persists after the CHI injector current (I_{INJ}) reaches zero at $t=9\text{ms}$, and further analysis indicates the plasma current decays inductively with a decay-rate consistent with the measured $T_e = 20\text{-}30\text{eV}$. As seen in Figure 12b, after the injector current turn-off and the open-field-line currents have decayed away, fast camera images exhibit light emission consistent with the reconstructed lower single null separatrix geometry. Later in the discharge, both the camera images and reconstructions show the plasma has detached from the lower divertor coil as evident in Figure 12c.

A key NSTX research goal is to extend these CHI plasmas to higher I_P and T_e . Recent Electron Bernstein Wave (EBW) emission measurements [15] indicate that EBW heating and current drive could ultimately contribute to this goal. High-harmonic fast-wave (HHFW) heating has already demonstrated the ability of heating $I_P=250\text{kA}$ ohmic plasmas from 200eV to 1.6keV in H-mode with f_{BS} of up to 80% [21]. Thus, if higher- T_e CHI target plasmas could be produced, HHFW should be capable of further heating such a plasma and potentially further increasing the plasma current through bootstrap and fast-wave current overdrive. However, parasitic losses from Parametric Decay Instabilities (PDI) [41] have previously been shown to increase at the lower $k_{||}$ needed for HHFW current drive. More recently, as shown in Figure 13a, wave-fields far from the antenna are measured to increase for lower $k_{||}$. These wave-field measurements are consistent with enhanced parasitic surface wave excitation and losses at the very low cut-off density associated with low $k_{||}$. Both PDI and surface-waves are expected to be reduced at higher toroidal field. Taking advantage of this new understanding and operating at highest allowable toroidal field = 0.55T , Figure 13b shows record T_e values approaching 4keV achieved with current-drive phasing for the first time. The results above improve the prospects for utilizing wave heating and current ramp-up of CHI target plasmas to initiate high performance ST plasmas.

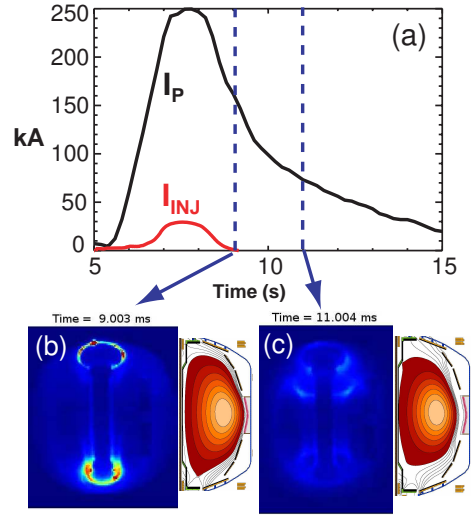


Figure 12: (a) Plasma and injector currents vs. time, and fast-camera images and flux-surface reconstructions at (b) peak closed-flux I_P and (c) during I_P decay.

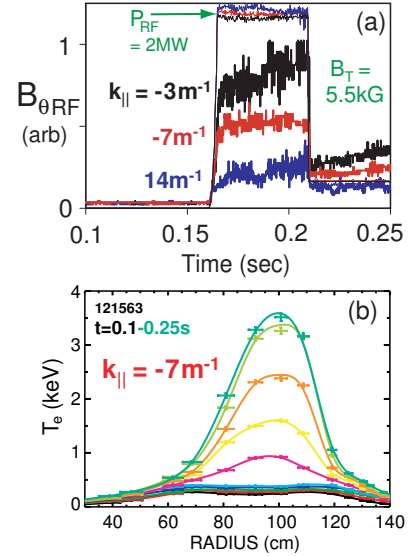


Figure 13: (a) Far-field HHFW B_{θ} amplitude vs. launched $k_{||}$, and (b) $T_e(t, R)$ for an $I_P = 700\text{kA}$, $B_T = 5.5\text{kG}$ target plasma heated with 2MW of HHFW.

7. Summary

NSTX has made significant progress in achieving and understanding sustained high-performance operation above the ideal no-wall stability limit with high non-inductive current fraction and good energy confinement. NSTX research is contributing to improved understanding of energy confinement scaling and the underlying causes of anomalous energy transport, the effect of multiple fast-ion instabilities on energetic particle confinement, novel methods for particle and divertor heat flux control, and solenoid-free plasma current formation and ramp-up physics. These results strengthen the scientific foundation for high performance operation in both ITER and future ST devices.

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